

**RETAIL ELECTRIC
COMPETITION:**

**A PROPOSAL TO EDUCATE
MISSOURI CITIZENS**

PREPARED BY THE
EDUCATION WORKING GROUP
IN CONJUNCTION WITH
CASE NO. EW-97-245
AND THE TASK FORCE ON
RETAIL ELECTRIC COMPETITION

SUBMITTED TO THE
MISSOURI PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
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THE EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

The Missouri Public Service Commission (PSC) opened an investigative inquiry into retail electric competition (Case No. EW-97-245) on March 28, 1997. In its order, the Commission charged a Retail Electric Competition Task Force "to identify the risks and benefits that would face the State of Missouri in the event retail competition occurs." Commissioners recognized the need to help the general public, their elected representatives and the Office of the Governor become familiar with issues in the restructuring debate. The Task Force issued its wide-ranging report and recommendations on May 1, 1998.

Among the Task Force suggestions was an urgent call to action:

*"... it is imperative that consumer education plan begin immediately... Consumers must be educated now about proposals to initiate retail competition and they must be educated on their choices, rights and responsibilities once specific legislation has been enacted. Finally, there must be an ongoing education campaign to ensure a reliable source of information so consumers can exercise informed choices."*¹

On June 17, 1998, Commissioners appointed a 12-member Education Working Group, representing a broad base of utility and consumer interests, to take the next step: developing a consumer education plan to explain the Task Force report. This document contains the Working Group's findings and recommendations.

Group members advise Commissioners to keep four basic principles in mind as they consider implementing a consumer education plan. First, the Task Force report should be described in a way that is neutral, balanced and free of bias. Second, this balanced "message" should be clearly expressed and consistently delivered. Third, Group members believe that Missouri can learn from the experience of other states and from consumer education efforts associated with other deregulated utility industries. Finally, although the Working Group has exceeded the Commission's original charge, members respectfully suggest that Missouri consumers can benefit from both immediate and continuing education efforts as the electric restructuring debate continues.

MESSAGE

In these early stages, even if they continue to have questions regarding the concepts of electric restructuring, it is suggested that consumers retain four core elements of the message

- "A national debate is in progress, and Missourians are part of it."
- "You, the consumer, need to be educated so that you can become an effective contributor to the debate."
- "Restructuring legislation has not yet been enacted in Missouri."
- "If restructuring takes place, there are potential risks and benefits."

Following some key communication strategies can increase the likelihood that consumers will retain the message.

- The person who delivers the message must have credibility with the audience
- The messenger may be more effective if he or she is tailored to the audience
- The message should be understandable to everyone, but it should not be simplified to the extent that it loses content
- The message should be compelling enough that audiences will take notice

The Task Force report, while complex, can be distilled to summarize its basic components, listed below. The summary could be used in its entirety or in a structured sequence, depending on the audience and the education method used (see Appendix for full text of summary).

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| • Introduction | • Reliability |
| • Four business lines | • Market power |
| • Market structure | • Tax impacts |
| • Public interest protection | • Stranded costs |

TARGET AUDIENCES

Each target audience represents a group or network of energy consumers, and each may have distinct needs, methods of communicating and sensitivity to the risks or benefits of electric restructuring. All are important contributors to the debate.

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Elected and appointed government officials | • Small industrial consumers |
| • Residential consumers | • Trade organizations and associations |
| • Lower-income persons | • Community-based organizations |
| • Elderly persons | • Health and education institutions |
| • General public | • Persons with disabilities |
| • Small business | • Non-English speakers |

Although reaching individual consumers should be the ultimate goal of the education program, it also is critical to communicate with state and regional networks that have local constituencies.

- It may be a more efficient use of scarce resources to reach networks that, in turn, can relay information to individuals
- Because networks tend to convene regularly, those meetings can provide communication venues for speakers
- Networks that feel enfranchised in the restructuring debate may agree to continually feed updated information to their constituencies

EDUCATION METHODS

Because target audiences are diverse, "one size does *not* fit all." To be most effective, education methods must match their audiences' favored learning styles and information resources. In addition, methods for educating networks may differ from reaching individuals through mass media. Finally, the choice of education methods may be affected by cost, availability, time constraints and appropriateness. Potential methods are listed below.

- Videotape (the Working Group suggests this method may be a high priority for development)
- Newsletters
- Toll-free telephone line
- Public service announcements
- Paid advertising
- Newspaper coverage, including news releases, feature stories, opinion editorial ("op ed") pieces from individual opinion leaders, visits with editorial boards
- Magazine articles
- Speakers bureau
- Utility bill inserts and messages
- Internet websites
- Report summaries
- Community cable and public television
- Alternative formats for disabled persons

Strategic partnerships and agreements could help assure that educational materials get widely distributed. In addition to the networks noted earlier, each potential partner listed below could help reach Missouri's diverse consumer audiences.

- Utility companies (could reach their residential and commercial customers)
- Labor organizations (could reach consumers and their families)
- Advertising agencies (could help design strategies for hard-to-reach audiences)
- Schools and libraries (could reach families, youth, general public)
- Statewide elected officials (could reach users of their programs or wider audiences)
- Quasi-governmental organizations, such as regional councils of government (could reach local elected and appointed government officials)

If this expertise is not already available for a consumer education program, retaining an education or communication consultant may be the best way to craft messages and help reach learning goals set for target audiences.

RESOURCES

This recommendation does not attempt to estimate the cost of a consumer education program; costs cannot be estimated unless specific choices are known. It is suggested, however, that short-term efforts be supported with existing resources from a collaborative of sponsors including:

- Federal, state and local government
- Associations and organizations
- Participants in the restructured electric environment

In the longer term, it is suggested that substantial resources will be needed to support consumer education, especially if mandated in restructuring legislation. Potential sources include:

- Utility assessments
- General Revenue
- Pooled funds from several state agencies
- Federal funds
- Contributions from private organizations

ONGOING EFFORTS

Working Group members enthusiastically support the Commission's interest in consumer education and also believe that efforts should not stop with an explanation of the Task Force report. It is recommended that education continue indefinitely, through all stages of the debate, and beyond (see Appendix for full text of Recommendations for Ongoing Consumer Education).

- Phase I – start *now* to explain the Task Force Report
- Phase II – keep the public aware of state (and, perhaps, federal) restructuring proposals
- Phase III – if restructuring legislation is enacted, help consumers know what to expect
- Phase IV – continue to help consumers make informed choices in the restructured market; help them address problems, identify needs

The Working Group recognizes that efforts like this don't "just happen." It is recommended that Commissioners take three important steps to assure that Missouri makes continued progress.

- Agree to facilitate a consumer education program, staffed by PSC employees and guided by a consumer education advisory panel, which should be a successor to the Working Group
- Include a wider representation of interests on this new advisory panel
- Implement all or part of the "Proposed Short-Range Plan to Educate Missourians" (pgs. 6-7)

¹ Page 2, Chapter 1 of *Consumer Protection for Retail Electric Competition – A Report to the Missouri Public Service Commission's Task Force on Retail Electric Competition from the Public Interest Protection Working Group, March 1998*, In the Matter of A Commission Inquiry into Retail Electric Competition, Missouri Case No. EW-97-245, Missouri Public Service Commission Retail Electric Competition Task Force Working Group Reports, Appendix to the Final Task Force Report, May 1, 1998.

RETAIL ELECTRIC COMPETITION PROPOSED SHORT-RANGE PLAN TO EDUCATE MISSOURIANS

Assumptions

- As recommended by the Task Force on Retail Electric Competition, education would start *now*
- As further suggested by the Education Working Group, education would continue and evolve over time
- Education would reach a variety of audiences through targeted information networks and through mass communication strategies

Timing

- Start Phase I immediately, and extend it as long as there is a need for basic information about electric restructuring
- Pull back formal education efforts during the holiday season to avoid competing with those messages
- Start Phase II when the Missouri General Assembly convenes in January, 1999
- Start Phase III after state restructuring legislation is enacted

PHASE I: COMMUNICATION OF THE TASK FORCE REPORT

August, 1998

- PSC issues order creating consumer education effort

September, 1998

- Define the entity that will "sponsor" and be associated with the message (e.g., PSC or successor to the Education Working Group)
- Refine and perfect the message
- Identify primary spokespersons; match with appropriate audiences and media

October, 1998

- If possible, kick off education effort in conjunction with National Energy Month (sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy) and with annual start-up of energy assistance programs
- Begin outreach to networks and mass audience using some or all of the options show below

Options for Reaching Networks	Options for Reaching Mass Audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speakers bureau• Articles in targeted publications• Report summaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• News releases• Op Ed articles in newspapers• Public Service Announcements (PSAs)• Internet websites• "Legislative Forum," produced by Learfield Network (Bob Priddy Interviews)

November, 1998

- Continue activity started in October
- Start work on consumer education video

December, 1998

- Pull back in mid-month; don't compete with holiday messages
- Start work on restructuring newsletter

PHASE II: LEGISLATIVE DEBATE PERIOD**January – Mid-May, 1999**

- Continue activity started in Phase I
- Add one or more new suggested options shown below to help consumers learn about legislative proposals
- Set up toll-free restructuring telephone line for questions from individuals
- Complete work on video; release to appropriate media markets and others

Options for Reaching Networks	Options for Reaching Mass Audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speakers bureau • Articles in targeted publications • Report summaries • <i>Add:</i> • Restructuring newsletter • Alternative formats • Video 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News releases • Op Ed articles in newspapers • Public Service Announcements (PSAs) • Internet websites • "Legislative Forum," produced by Learfield Network (Bob Priddy Interviews) • <i>Add:</i> • Utility bill stuffers or messages • Video

Potential Expenses

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplies for paper communications • Postage • Telephone and fax communication • Printing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel expenses for speakers, staff • Handling, storing, distributing materials • Production costs for broadcast options |
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Education Program Support Functions

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management, evaluation • Meeting organization • Research • Writing, editing, publishing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up on inquiries • Call handling • Website maintenance • Scheduling speakers |
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APPENDICES

RECOMMENDED MESSAGE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ONGOING CONSUMER EDUCATION

RECOMMENDED MESSAGE

SUMMARY OF MISSOURI PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION RETAIL ELECTRIC COMPETITION TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT

I. Introduction

A national inquiry is underway to determine whether the electric utility industry should be restructured to permit consumers to choose their supplier of electricity and thus substantially change the traditional regulated system of monopoly franchises. This re-examination of the current system is mainly driven by the belief, held by some, that current prices or rates do not accurately reflect the costs necessary to produce electricity in an efficient manner. Although the restructuring movement began in areas of the United States where electric rates are far higher than in Missouri, the potential benefits to all classes of consumers have resulted in a national debate.

Electric industry restructuring bills were introduced during the last two sessions of the Missouri General Assembly. Restructuring issues have also been raised in recent Missouri Public Service Commission (PSC) cases. A task force appointed by the Missouri PSC, the Retail Electric Competition Task Force, recently completed a report examining many of the important issues that are part of the public policy debate over whether and how the electric industry should be restructured to introduce additional competition. Recommendations made by the task force provide a basic road map of pitfalls and problems that must be addressed, as well as some general guidance for policy makers who are addressing electric industry restructuring issues.

Missourians have become accustomed to seeing the lights go on whenever they flip a light switch. Restructuring the electric industry should not jeopardize the reliability that Missourians have come to expect, if it occurs through a carefully managed transition.

The task force recognized that policy decisions about electric restructuring should be made carefully because affordable electric service is essential to the health and welfare of Missouri citizens. The task force also agreed that retail competition should only occur if it can be shown to benefit all classes of customers. The ongoing policy debate about restructuring Missouri's electric industry may lead to a competitive market for electricity that could affect the way consumers buy electricity and the prices that they pay.

II. Generation, Transmission, Distribution and Customer Service

To understand provider choice and recommendations for restructuring the electric utility industry, one must understand the existing industry structure. The industry includes four key business lines.

- "Generation" is the business area that produces electricity and delivers power to interconnected transmission lines at a high voltage level.
- "Transmission" involves the transportation of electricity at high voltage levels from generating stations to local distribution systems and large consumers.
- "Distribution" involves delivering electricity at lower voltage levels from the transmission system to the consumer through the poles and lines that run down the streets of cities, towns and neighborhoods.
- "Customer service" is the business line that provides contact with the consumer--the billing, metering and other services that facilitate delivery and sale of energy.

III. Market Structure

If the electric industry is restructured, it is likely that both transmission and distribution will continue to be regulated regardless of the market structure that is chosen. The task force assumed that generation would eventually be provided competitively. This would mean that the current regulatory determination of the rates retail customers pay would no longer apply -- at least for that portion of the rates that covers the costs of generating electricity. In a competitive environment, consumers -- even those who choose to remain with their existing utilities -- would no longer, in most cases, have a rate for electric generation service that is determined by the Missouri Public Service Commission. Instead, the price for generation service would be determined in competitive markets. However, customer services, such as metering and billing, might be either provided competitively or continue to be provided by the existing utility on a regulated basis. According to the task force report, restructuring could be accomplished through one of three basic market structures - Direct Access, Poolco or Hybrid models.

Direct Access is a structure through which retail consumers can select from among competing providers of electric generation service. The provider directly negotiates with a consumer to be that consumer's electric supplier of choice and/or makes available certain standard service offers for various defined customer segments.

Under Poolco, an entity would be formed to buy generation service on behalf of consumers with pricing determined by a competitive bidding procedure set through a regulatory process. Existing utilities would be required to purchase all energy services necessary to meet their customers' needs from the Poolco at the Poolco's cost. Consumers would continue to purchase electricity from their existing utility.

The Hybrid model combines aspects of both the Direct Access model and the Poolco model. Like the Direct Access model, consumers would be able to choose among providers of generation service. In addition, customers could choose to remain with their local utility. That utility would buy generation service for them from a new entity called a "power exchange." The power exchange would purchase generation service on a competitive bid basis (using a procedure set through a regulatory process) for local utilities and others who elect to buy these services from the power exchange.

Consumers could join together to combine (or "aggregate") their generation service needs and negotiate with providers as a group under either the Hybrid model or the Direct Access model. Groups with similar interests such as residential subdivisions, shopping centers, trade organizations, and employer/employee groups may perform aggregation. In addition, new entities, known as "load aggregators", may provide the service of obtaining generation to serve the combined loads of their clients.

IV. Public Interest Protection

Electric service is essential to the health and welfare of Missouri citizens. All Missouri consumers, including high-risk consumers, should have access to a basic level of affordable and reliable service at just and reasonable rates.

Consumer Protection

The task force report contained the following recommendations:

- Consumers should be confident that they will be no worse off in the restructured environment. Rate reductions or caps have been used in some other states to offer some price stability during the transition period for electric restructuring. The effects of these types of price mechanisms should be examined.
- At a minimum, existing consumer protection rules must be retained. New rules and protections may also be needed to address consumers' increased exposure in the competitive market.
- A strong focus should be placed on preventing marketing abuse.
- Retail electric providers should be required to meet some type of licensing or certification requirements to help assure the consumer that these are legitimate financially stable business entities. A licensing program should be developed that will provide some assurance to the consumer of the supplier's financial stability and ability to provide service.
- Guidelines for the protection of consumer privacy must be determined.
- All consumers must be assured of access to continuous electric service. Therefore, any efforts at restructuring should include provisions for what would be termed a "provider of last resort." This provider would provide a safety net for those consumers who are not attractive to competitive providers and for those who do not choose an electric service provider.
- The state legislature should require the Commission to develop rules containing minimum, verifiable, enforceable, uniform standards of disclosure that will allow consumers to easily compare items of interest such as price, price variability, contract terms and conditions, and other relevant and material factors.
- Metering and billing services now provided by the local distribution utility may stay with the company or may also become "competitive services." The task force also recommended that the Commission should consider a rule allowing consumers the option of receiving a single bill for their electricity service.

Public Benefits

Public goods are defined as things that will not be produced and delivered solely by the free market but produce a value to society at large. They are “public” because they are consumed by the public, and their use cannot be restricted to the benefit of a single buyer or groups of buyers.

Low Income Protections

The task force concluded that a cost-effective low-income program should be maintained and improved. The application of other energy assistance programs, such as a percent-of-income payment plan and weatherization programs, should also be explored in examining ways to assure continued access to reasonably priced electric power.

Environmental Protections

Protection for the environment is important in considering a move to restructure the electric utility industry. The task force focused on the possible impact of restructuring on environmental quality, public interest energy research and development of, and support for, energy efficiency programs and renewable resource technologies.

The task force analyzed existing environmental protection and public benefit programs that protect or contribute to environmental quality and recommended that, under restructuring:

- Standards for environmental quality should be preserved or improved, and compliance with current or future standards must be ensured;
- Adequate provision for the proper closure and decommissioning of generation facilities must be ensured;
- Research and development should be encouraged, and the feasibility of the expansion of renewable resource technology in Missouri should be explored;
- The appropriateness of the current site review process for new generation and transmission facilities should be evaluated and modified, where appropriate;
- Public benefit programs that address energy efficiency and research, development and demonstration of new technologies should be encouraged.

V. Reliability

Any industry structure that permits customers a choice of electric providers must address measures to maintain safe and reliable operations while also ensuring equitable treatment to all customers and market participants. No changes in the electric industry should be allowed to compromise safety or reliability. Any of the three market structures can be implemented without sacrificing safety or reliability if restructuring occurs through a carefully managed transition process that allows technical and administrative requirements to be developed and implemented. The task force recommended that the Commission examine the need to modify standards and monitor the distribution system reliability and safety of (jurisdictional) local distribution utilities following industry restructuring. Distribution planning and emergency response should remain the responsibilities of the local distribution utility, according to task force recommendations.

VI. Market Power

If the electric utility industry is restructured so that the industry relies more on market forces and less on regulation to ensure that prices are reasonable, then a competitive market must develop to restrain suppliers from charging prices that greatly exceed costs. The potential benefits to consumers from electric industry restructuring would be limited if competitive providers have the ability to exercise what is referred to as "market power." Market power is the ability of a firm, alone or in concert with other firms, to profitably maintain the price of a product above the competitive market level for an extended period of time. Suppliers with vertical or horizontal market power could charge unfair prices and realize excessive profits.

- *Vertical* market power involves the ability of a firm to control an essential element in the vertical production chain and, through that control, cause competitors to be at a disadvantage through either restricted access or higher costs for the products or services required to produce and deliver the specific product.
- *Horizontal* market power exists when a single firm or small group of firms has the ability to affect the price of a product. In the case of a single firm, horizontal market power is present when a firm dominates a market where entry barriers protect it from competition. In the case of a small group of firms, horizontal market power can occur through explicit collusive behavior or through strategies that jointly maximize the self-interest of each of the firms.

The task force explored numerous potential vertical and horizontal market power problems and identified a range of options to protect consumers from market power abuses.

VII. Tax Impacts

The task force found that, to the extent that the competitive supply of generation affects tax revenues, the state legislature should: seek equal tax treatment for competing energy suppliers; seek to maintain revenue opportunities for state and local governments, so they are not harmed by electric industry restructuring; and structure any modification to the tax laws to minimize shifting tax burdens among customer classes or among customers within a particular class.

The task force also recommended that tax laws should be structured so that tax collection and compliance are not hindered because of changes in tax systems. The state and local tax systems should be structured to enhance the competitiveness of Missouri businesses. Finally, the task force recommended that the state legislature design tax legislation that would not attract legal challenges.

VIII. Stranded Cost

Electric utilities have been regulated at the state level through a process that sets rates at a level that allows utilities the opportunity to earn a reasonable return on prudently incurred expenses and investments. The fundamental stranded cost issue is, if retail competition is permitted, should utilities be allowed to recover from their customers (entirely, in part, or not at all) the difference between the market price and the regulated charge? For example, consumers may leave the local utility, or the price the utility can charge in a competitive market may fail to cover the costs of facilities built before competition. These unrecoverable costs are referred to as "stranded."

It is possible that some low-cost utilities will have what is called “negative stranded costs.” These exist when the amount the utility can charge in a competitive market is higher than the rates that utility had been charging for existing generation assets. The negative stranded cost issue is whether customers should receive an “offset” or “credit” under these circumstances. For utilities expected to have negative stranded costs, options range from allowing utilities the full benefit of the market gains, to giving that full benefit to customers, to sharing the difference between customers and shareholders.

The task force took no position on the issue of overall recoverability of stranded costs associated with the implementation of competition.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ONGOING CONSUMER EDUCATION

The Education Working Group has developed for the PSC the following recommendations regarding the important goal of educating the public about electric restructuring. This report primarily focuses on the immediate goal of widely communicating the general findings of the May 1, 1998 Final Report of the Task Force on Retail Electric Competition. However, the Working Group strongly believes that efforts to educate the public should move beyond this immediate goal and should continue during the restructuring debate and after any restructuring legislation is passed. The Working Group foresees this educational task evolving over time and naturally dividing into the four distinct phases described below. Each phase has specific goals and specific messages. However, some of the efforts of a specific phase may need to be continued into subsequent phases. For example, activities to communicate the Task Force report begun in Phase I should continue into Phase II during the legislative debate monitoring functions.

The Working Group recommends that the PSC appoint a successor to this Working Group which can attempt to pursue the basic goals described in this report, such as the Consumer Education Advisory Panel recommended below. Many of the Working Group members have expressed an interest in volunteering to serve on such an advisory panel. Our educational goals can be best advanced by maintaining organizational continuity as restructuring nears, although it will be necessary for a successor group to evolve and change its focus after any restructuring legislation has passed.

Phase I. Communication of the Task Force Report

Over the next few months, it is recommended that an effort be undertaken to inform the general public of the contents of the Task Force's final report. It is recommended that the PSC appoint a broad-based group of interested stakeholders to serve on a Consumer Education Advisory Panel which will carry forth the goals outlined in this report and provide advice to the Commission on an ongoing basis. This panel should at least include the diversity that was represented on the Working Group and could emulate the structure of similar panels in other states.

The PSC would facilitate the efforts of the panel to provide consumer education through some or all of the methods described below. The panel also would monitor the impact of these educational efforts, organize information regarding electric restructuring and continue to identify other feasible education methods. The role of this group will become increasingly important in the subsequent phases described below.

The Working Group believes that any effective consumer education program will require significant funding. In order to fund educational efforts prior to any restructuring legislation, the PSC is urged to pursue various funding sources, including cooperative funding opportunities.

Phase II. Legislative Debate Period

It is anticipated that the 1999 Missouri legislative session will be the focus of continued debate and discussion regarding electric restructuring in our state. It is possible that the legislative debate will continue beyond 1999. Regardless of the duration of the debate period, it is agreed that the best policies for Missouri will result from the widest possible participation from the public. The

overriding goal during this phase should be to educate the general public so that they may effectively contribute to the debate and help shape the direction of any legislation.

It is recommended that during this phase, the Consumer Education Advisory Panel attempt to involve as many citizens as possible, to allow their effective involvement in this historic debate, by providing objective information about the status of restructuring legislation. While the panel might want to meet as infrequently as every three months, it is recommended that the panel meet monthly during the legislative session. The panel should attempt to maintain lists of currently proposed bills on this topic along with legislative summaries of these bills. A consensus on the panel should be required regarding any information that is disseminated in order to maintain neutrality. The panel could utilize the list of potential partners and proven education methods to encourage public participation in the legislative and restructuring processes.

Phase III. Transition Period

Once legislation has been enacted, the focus of consumer education should shift to communicating the components of the legislation that was passed. The Consumer Education Advisory Panel should continue to play a role in facilitating the education effort. At this point, consumers may be given specific information on the workings of the market. Educational efforts should address or explain items such as:

- Major components of the legislation;
- Responsibility for consumer interest issues, like reliability and dispute resolution;
- Certification and licensing requirements for providers;
- Consumer protection rules;
- New choices that may be available to consumers;
- Where to go for more information.

Methods to communicate this information should consider the use of brochures, speakers bureaus, public service announcements, toll-free numbers, Internet access and newsletters. This phase of the plan should continue until the introduction of retail competition.

Phase IV. Implementation Period

This final phase of a consumer education plan after the implementation of retail competition should provide strategies for ensuring that consumers understand and take full advantage of the opportunities that a restructured electric industry may offer them. Activities could include:

- Providing consumer information on fraudulent or deceptive marketing practices;
- Targeting consumers who did not participate in choosing;
- Providing an ongoing source of objective, accurate information on providers;
- Evaluating the effectiveness of educational materials;
- Distributing consumer protection rules;
- Assessing consumers' exposure to the market.

This ongoing phase would include evaluation to assess the effectiveness of consumer education and communication efforts and to facilitate the redesign of specific efforts. At this phase of the education process, the responsibility for the ongoing education of the consumer should be funded within the Public Service Commission and the Office of the Public Counsel. Other

funding sources, including cooperative funding sources, should also be explored. The assignment of this responsibility to these agencies would provide the assurance of objective data collection and dissemination and some regulatory authority over providers, probably through the licensing process. The Consumer Education Advisory Panel discussed earlier may become an oversight function to assure the continuing effectiveness of the education effort to reach specific groups.